

Pioneer Press, October 6, 2005

Gangs are a growing presence in Lake County, and are targeting younger children for recruitment, law enforcement officials and politicians said during a gang summit this week on the College of Lake County campus.

U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-10th of Highland Park, said more than 3,000 gang members are estimated to be operating in the county.

Waukegan police officials said the average target age for most gangs is now eighth grade.

Of particular concern to gang experts is an influx of heroin coming into the United States from Afghanistan and other countries. The new pure heroin does not have to be injected with needles but can be snorted or ingested, making it more appealing to suburban youth. Kirk said the drug trafficking is fueling gang activity here.

Speakers urged the school and law enforcement officials in attendance to adopt zero tolerance policies and be on the lookout for gang graffiti and other signs of gang presence.

"Every parent in Lake County has a right to send their children to a safe, gang-free school," Kirk said.

Gurnee Police Officer Chad Tompoles said he has noticed an increased amount of gang graffiti in the parks and on school buildings in the Gurnee area during the past sixth months.

Of growing concern is a new Latin gang, with many members who are migrating to the area from Mexico and California. One of the gang's members was responsible for a beating incident that occurred at the Gurnee Mills shopping center in February, he said.